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Email from Geneva

3 messages

Geneva M [redacted] <[redacted].com>

Tue, Feb 15, 2022 at 1:38 AM

To: Steve Morgan <stevemorgan@joshua-church.com>, John Anthony <johnanthony@joshua-church.com>, Travis Wong <traviswong@joshua-church.com>, Sam Menzies <sammenzies@joshua-church.com>

Hi Everyone,

I am contacting you guys to let you know that this Sunday was my last day as a member and attending Joshua Church. I have experienced a lot of God's faithfulness during my time here; there have been times I've been loved deeply and well. There have also been times that I have been deeply wounded and traumatized. It's unfortunately the depth and nature of this trauma that doesn't allow me to attend in a way that's safe for me.

Leading up to a while ago when I was asked to leave, I had experienced a lot of gossip, judgement, and ostracizing by members and leaders, and I have seen it happen to other members of our body as well. That in conjunction with being asked to leave put me in a darkness that I never knew was possible. Sitting in that room that day I distinctly remember the exact moment my heart went completely dark. In a matter of a seconds my ability to believe God's promises were gone, not just gone but taken. God's body was no longer a family, all the lies and harm my parents used with their words must be true, and if God's own people don't want me then there is no where in this world where I could ever be wanted and accepted. I was gone that day and with no hope of being found.

You may be wondering why something like this is such a big deal, or you may be thinking that I'm overreacting (which my small group leader at the time told me) and for a long time I believed that was true. I spent every night, every lunch break, every still moment for over a year sobbing from the pain of it all "Geneva, get it together this shouldn't be so serious." I spent every waking moment staring into nothingness playing the moment of being asked to leave, and every single detail before it over and over again trying to figure out how this happened and what I can do to make sure I never experience pain like that again. "Why is this affecting me so much?" I was hiding in cleaning closets at church having panic attacks, I was stress vomiting during and after every small group, my hair was falling and I was developing bald spots, my body was crying out for a witness that I was not willing to provide until it all ended in a suicide attempt. The shock of surviving was when I was finally humble enough to realize the truth-what I experienced was trauma, but I couldn't understand why it was and why I was affected so deeply. God led me to his word:

- "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we looked upon and have touched with our hands, concerning the word of life-the life was made manifest, and we have seen it and testify to it and proclaim to you the eternal life, which was with the Father and was made manifest to us-that which we have seen and heard we proclaim also to you, so that you too may have fellowship with us; and indeed our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son Jesus Christ." -1 John 1:1-3
 - "...the purpose of this proclamation is not just forgiveness of people's sins (as a simplified view of evangelism would have it) but is far richer, **for the gospel message binds together those who receive it...**" ESV study notes on verse 3
- "Remember those who are in prison, as though in prison with them, and those who are mistreated, since you also are in the body." -Hebrews 13:3
- "For just as the body is one and has many members, and all the members of the body, though many, are one body, so it is with Christ. For *in one Spirit* we were all baptized *into one body*-Jews or Greeks, slaves or free- and *all were made to drink of one Spirit*... But as it is, *God* arranged the members in the body, each one of them, *as he chose*. If all were a single member, where would the body be? As it is, there are many parts yet one body. The eye *cannot* say to the hand, "I have no need of you, nor again the head to the feet, "I have no need of

you." On the contrary, **the parts of the body that seem to be weaker are indispensable**, and on those parts of the body that we *think* less honorable we bestow the greater honor to the part that lacked it, **that there may be no division in the body, but that the members may have the same care for one another**. If one member suffers, all suffer together; if one member is honored, all rejoice together." -1 Corth. 12:12-26

It is a serious matter to be joined to God's body. To set aside those whom God has selected to be a part of his body is to cause severe harm. Some members are pruned, others are prematurely broken off-the natural progression of a severed branch is death.

I do not say this to cause harm, pain, or shame, nor do I want anyone to fear. I had no hope of surviving if God did not heal me miraculously by the power of His word alone. I had resolved to let everyone around me know I was fine while secretly planning an attempt that I could assure would be successful. For some reason out of God's mercy I was at small group as normal when the scripture we were discussing was read out loud: "For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function, so we, though many *are one body in Christ*, and individually members *one of another*." (Romans 12:4-5) Instantly I was no longer in small group but in a vision-I was looking in some sort of spiritual realm and it was a large body. The body was all intact except one of its arms was missing. The shoulder wasn't actively bleeding but it was still very red, raw, and fresh as if it never healed. The body was covered in cuts and the whole body was crying and violently shaking from the intensity of the tears. Though I can't see them, I hear what I can only describe as thousands of spiritual beings loudly wailing and weeping. In this moment I hear God say this is what it would be like if I ended my life. This picture and the wailing is replaying for the rest of the night and tears are all I know until I wake up the next morning. I need you to understand what I mean when I describe this vision-the body was brutal and ugly, and the sound of thousands of unseen spiritual beings weeping and wailing is something I never want to experience again. I walked into small group that day hopelessly suicidal beyond anything I had ever experienced before and left that night forever healed. My brothers, isn't God good? Isn't God kind and merciful? Aren't His promises assured that no one or thing can snatch anyone from his hand?

I know I have received an apology about some of the details involved in being asked to leave (mainly that if they knew the nature of the relationship with my mom they wouldn't have suggested that), so there may be confusion on why I still feel so unheard and that repentance has been missed. I'd like to clarify some of my thoughts on that.

1. The beginning and end of the process of me being asked to leave was not handled appropriately. If there were issues that anyone had they should have first been addressed to me first before it ever got to a point that pastor involvement felt necessary and that leaving was necessary. This never happened and I never knew that it was an issue
2. At one point concern was brought up about me reaching out too often to friends. I was doing this based on the direction I received from my small group leader at that time that I realize in hindsight I misunderstood. If at any point my small group leader or anyone brought it up to me before getting anyone else involved it would have been instantly corrected and never have gotten that far as I generally feel shame with reaching out. It felt like a weak spot in my heart was weaponized against me all due to poor communication.
3. Getting my mom's number and calling her without at any point contacting me first to hear from me directly what was going on with me crossed even the most basic of boundaries. To this day I have no idea how anyone got my mom's number.
4. It was inappropriate to have a meeting with all the main pastors at that time about what to do with me when I was at no point in the process communicated with. It's hazardous to make decisions on behalf of someone and at no point include them in the process.
5. The impact of this decision was profound and the impact ought to be acknowledged and cared for without being blinded by intention.
6. I appreciate that great care was taken to try to make clear the decision came from a place of good intention and care. I feel that overtime this has been hard for me to swallow. During that meeting I expressed multiple times that I do not have a good relationship with my mom and that it was not a good option. The recommendation of leaving and living with her still moved forward despite my insistence. My voice was not heard and therefore deemed powerless and unnecessary. It felt as if I was in a car with my leaders driving, and I'm saying over and over "do not turn here or we will crash." Hearing this, the turn was still made and the vehicle is totaled. I was left alone in the wreckage with no hope of surviving except by God's timely grace of saving me. If God did not heal me so suddenly and drastically my blood would be on this church's hands. If a member of your own body is

saying a decision you're making about them is a bad idea you cannot plow your way through their God given courage. I think sometimes in your desire to be seen as just a normal member on par with the rest of the body it's forgotten how much power and influence you guys have over us. You *have* to be willing to slow down enough to truly listen and hear what information they have that may be missing. So much information and context was missing. Most car accidents are an accident, and not intentional, but all require responsibility and reparation for the damage.

7. It was wrong to suggest that because I didn't move forward with the suggestion of leaving and moving home that I didn't trust leaders.
8. I had multiple meetings expressing how I had been having a hard time after being asked to leave. I have a hard time understanding how no one could see how poorly I was doing after this. It hurts to know that based on Matthew 5:23-24 that at no point has anyone involved come to me in this matter. Only one person has at any point apologized. I should not have been the sole person reaching out. I had to beg for help from anyone who would listen. I walked around our church building being spiritually starved, a spiritual beggar, living like the prophets of Baal who limped around an altar cutting themselves hoping their god would hear them. I felt I was left with the hired hand in John 10:11-13. But the Lord heard my cries and in time had mercy on us all.

This in conjunction with the way the website is being handled is why I cannot in good conscience remain in the network. I don't believe we are honoring God and his people and I believe we are neglecting essential parts of His word. I can't in good conscience believe that having 2 websites and a reddit thread doesn't disqualify from leadership based on the requirement listed multiple times in scripture that leaders must be above reproach and well thought of by outsiders. I have a hard time believing that if our network lived out Matthew 5:23-34 well it would have never gotten to a magnitude this large. A significant portion of the allegations would not exist if we lived out Matthew 25:35-40. Our public response as of now has not represented Luke 6:27-30 well. Luke 6:43-45 requires me to ask where all this bad fruit is coming from. I will whole heartily admit that our church and network has seen good fruit, but the sudden large volume of bad fruit requires me to ask God what kind of tree we are. It requires me to ask "what kind of church are people being saved into, and will they one day have to be saved from it?" Churches that live out Luke 10:25-37 don't have websites of this nature. If we are what 2 Corinthians 20 says then doesn't our "if you don't like it then leave" message speak against the very nature of God's heart and character? Those who see their members as *indispensable* and seek to live out Ephesians 4:1-6 do not say messages like this so casually because to do so would be to speak harm on the body they belong to, which would be to speak harm against themselves and God. Based on Isaiah 58: 3-11 I worry that many of our actions will prove to be in vain. 1 Peter 4:17 alludes to Ezekiel 9:1-6 and Malachi 3:1-4 and I worry that this is what we may be walking in. These are the initial scriptures that come to mind that make me believe the response of the website to be mishandled and sinful.

I want to honor the Lord well, I want to love His body well and those who have left and have been harmed and traumatized are part of the body of Christ. I have given all I could give and have prayed *desperately* that there would be unity and reconciliation in the midst of all of this. We are connected to those who have left, they are members of God's church, we **need** them, and we will spend eternity with them. I cannot leave them behind.

I thought I had more time left here. I thought I could keep going. The past couple of sermons have felt jarring and I left each time with the sudden return of thoughts of harming myself. I'm not sure why the enemy has sought to torture me like that in his church but it makes it so that I cannot continue here. I want the best for everyone and that includes the church within the walls and the church without. This email has been sent to all the pastors on staff as well as Chris. His is slightly different as there were a few things I wanted to share that felt more appropriate to send to him solely.

I'm sure this is a lot of information and hard information to hear and digest. I'm open and willing for this to be a continuing discussion in person as this is a lot to write out and there is still even more that I could share. I'm sad, and my friends are sad. Please love them, take care of them, and be gentle with them. They have walked with me through all of this while also listening and trusting the leaders here with a grace I cannot put words to. Please hear them. They are godly and faithful women who are worth being trusted. I'm thankful to leave alive but I'm sad I'm not leaving whole. There's still much healing in my heart and much fear that I will never feel safe from being discarded in God's church again. I didn't expect to make this decision this soon so I didn't prepare as much for this email as I would like. Please forgive me if anything comes off poorly or wrongly, and let me know as I would like to make that right.

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John Anthony <johnanthony@joshua-church.com>
To: Geneva M <[REDACTED]>
Cc: Chris Miller <chrismiller@joshua-church.com>

Tue, Feb 15, 2022 at 12:43 PM

Hi Geneva,

Thank you for reaching out to us and we'd like to reiterate how appreciative we are for how faithfully you've served Jesus and Joshua Church over these many years. We are entirely grateful to God for the difference you felt that night after small group. He is kind and merciful and his promise to hold on to us is certain. We too want to honor the Lord, love his people, give ourselves in prayer to the unity of believers and to reconcile people to God and one another. Although we do this imperfectly and misunderstandings arise, we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things (Heb. 13:18). We hope the best for you even if it means being a member of Christ's family in another church community. Although it saddens us that you feel like you can no longer keep going here, we respect your decision, and we know that the Holy Spirit can complete that process of healing that he's begun in you.

John-Anthony Owen
Staff Pastor | Joshua Church



[Quoted text hidden]

Chris Miller <chrismiller@joshua-church.com>
To: John Anthony <johnanthony@joshua-church.com>
Cc: Geneva M <[REDACTED]>

Tue, Feb 15, 2022 at 1:00 PM

Hey Geneva,

John-Anthony and I wrote this email together. Thank you for reaching out.

Chris Miller
chrismiller@joshua-church.com



On Feb 15, 2022, at 12:43 PM, John Anthony <johnanthony@joshua-church.com> wrote:

Hi Geneva,

Thank you for reaching out to us and we'd like to reiterate how appreciative we are for how faithfully you've served Jesus and Joshua Church over these many years. We are entirely grateful to God for the difference you felt that night after small group. He is kind and merciful and his promise to hold on to us is certain. We too want to honor the Lord, love his people, give ourselves in prayer to the unity of believers and to reconcile people to God and one another. Although we do this imperfectly and misunderstandings arise, we are sure that we have a clear conscience, desiring to act honorably in all things (Heb. 13:18). We hope the best for you even if it means being a member of Christ's family in another church community. Although it saddens us that you feel like you can no longer keep going here, we respect your decision, and we know that the Holy Spirit can complete that process of healing that he's begun in you.

John-Anthony Owen
Staff Pastor | Joshua Church

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